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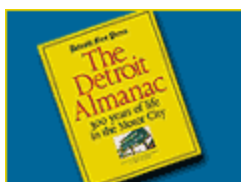
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House panel seeks funds for Great Lakes, waterways cleanup

July 12, 2001

BY CRAIG LINDER

STATES NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON -- Efforts to purge some rivers and Great Lakes harbors of contaminated sediment would get a big boost from the federal government under legislation a House panel considered Wednesday.

The bill would provide \$250 million over five years to clean 42 sites that are seen by the United States and Canada as top priorities for cleanup. Sites in southeastern Michigan include the Clinton, Detroit and Rouge rivers.

U.S. Rep. Vernon Ehlers, a Grand Rapids Republican who sponsored the legislation, said contaminated river sediments are a continuing source of pollution.

The state has also committed \$25 million to clean toxic hot spots, but the money and the proposed \$250 million from the federal government wouldn't come close to meeting the estimated \$8 billion it will cost to clean up the Great Lakes and its tributaries.

The funding could signal a larger federal commitment to the lakes' health, said Tim Eder, the director of the National Wildlife Federation's Great Lakes office in Ann Arbor.

"It's welcome but it's obviously not enough money," Eder said. "It's a down payment -- a

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step in the right direction."

Contaminants pose a long-term problem in Great Lakes water. Lake Superior, for instance, retains its water for 173 years, and it takes Lake Michigan 62 years to flush out all its water. With no quick release into another body of water, toxins often settle to the sediment. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the contaminated sediments are the main reason that some Great Lakes fish are unsafe for frequent consumption because they accumulate toxins such as mercury and PCBs.

"The cleanup of these toxic hot spots has long been one of our most daunting tasks, but it is absolutely essential if we are to protect and restore this resource for both our own and future generations," said Emily Green, the director of the Sierra Club's Great Lakes program in Madison, Wis.

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